

Learning Along the Way

By Sharon Cumberland

Math:

- **Time Addition/Subtraction** -- Set the clock in your car ahead a few minutes (or if you aren't worried about being late somewhere, set it back a few minutes.) Tell your kids how many minutes the clock is off and have them calculate what time it really is.
- **Count something** -- Once while driving to Santa Maria from SLO we decided to count American flags. I was surprised by how many we found. It kept the kids' heads up and looking out the windows. They noticed other things too. It also sparked conversations like, "Why do banks always have flags?", etc. Choose something that you think you'll see on the trip (American flags, mission bells, Starbucks, purple suitcases or babies, etc. if you are flying) and have the kids keep track of how many you find.
- **Sign Math** -- There are numbers on signs all over freeways and airports and there are all sorts of math equations you can come up with using them. Point out an exit sign, ie. Exit 217. Tell them what number exit you are taking and ask them to calculate the difference or add them together. Use your flight number to make a division problem.
- **Fuel Estimation** -- Challenge your kids to estimate what the cost will be to fill your gas tank based on how many gallons you should need and the cost per gallon. Tell them how many miles your car can travel on one tank and have them figure out how many miles you should be able to go.
- **Meal Estimation** -- Have your kids estimate what the cost of your meal out will be. (Perhaps offer a prize, like a dessert, for close estimates if some encouragement is needed for participation.)
- **Moving Multiplication** -- When a farm truck or some other vehicle carrying multiple packages passes your car, try to see if you can estimate the number of crates it is carrying. For example, if it is 3 crates high with 4 rows and each row has 5 crates -- how many total? You can also try this while watching luggage being loaded onto a plane.
- **Word Problems** -- Make up word problems. There is all sorts of material to choose from when you are traveling. "If we are 60 miles from Grandpa's house and it is 6:00 pm and we are driving 60 miles per hour, what time should we arrive at Grandpa's house?"
- **Shape Search** -- For younger kids, have them look for shapes. See if they can spy rectangles, circles, diamonds, etc. Or simply play "Hunt for Numbers" and have them tell you when they see a number they know.

Language Arts:

- **Grammar: [Mad libs](#)** -- These are the best for practicing grammar and having some silly fun. Bonus challenge --require them to use "quality adjectives" and "strong verbs" and get some IEW practice in at the same time.

- **Word Poetry** -- Head to Fred and Betty's or any dollar store and pick-up cheap metal cookies sheet. Give your kids some [word magnets](#) and see what they can come up with. For early readers, just bring along magnetic letters and let them see what they can spell or simply practice their letter sounds.
- **Rhyming** -- Play a rhyming game. Pick a word and see how many (real or not real) words you can come up with that rhyme.
- **Opposites Game** -- For littles, it can be as simple as "What is the opposite of 'up'?" However, this game can be played with older kids to really strengthen vocabulary. Ask them things like "What is the opposite of miserly?" or challenge them to come up with words and see if you can find an antonym. (You may want to pack your thesaurus for this one or just use the app.)
- **Letter Search** -- Just like numbers, letters are everyone when you travel. Try to find every letter of the alphabet. Look for personalized license plates and try to guess what they mean. Talk about any missing letters that the owner left out to fit it on the plate.
- **The Library** -- One of my favorite ways to prepare for a long car drive is a trip to the library. The kids each get to check out a stack of books. (If we make the trip to the library a day or two before the actual travel, I only let them look at one or two books and make sure to save the rest for the trip.) Excellent book choices for traveling are often found in the kids' non-fiction section. Ones with lots of interesting pictures like an eye-spy book, *Where's Waldo* or anything from DK or National Geographic Kids. Even if your child cannot read, look for books with images that you know will keep your child's attention.
- **Audiobooks** -- Have kids that will get carsick if they are reading or looking down too much in the car? Audiobooks can be an **AMAZING** way to pass the time in the car. There are many ways to get audiobooks. You can borrow them on CD from the [library](#) or download them as well. Or if you prefer, you can purchase them from Audible, etc. [The Read-Aloud Revival](#) offers a list of children's audiobooks that are great deals on Amazon. Also, check out [Librivox](#) for free audiobooks. Here are a few audiobooks that our ENTIRE family has enjoyed.
 - Any [Paddington](#) book (especially those read by Hugh Bonneville.)
 - [Winne the Pooh](#)
 - [The Wizard of Oz](#) read by Anne Hathaway
- **Spelling** -- Use the *All About Spelling* app to quiz kids on their phonograms.
- **BINGO** -- Print up [blank bingo sheets](#) and fill them in with anything you think you may see. On a drive from Texas to California, we played "RoadKill Bingo". I made guesses as to the types of roadkill we might encounter and we crossed it off the board when we spotted it. The kids thought this was hilarious. You can fill in the boards with numbers, words to look for, types of animals, types of vehicles, the possibilities are endless.

Science:

- **Name that Terrain** -- discuss the different types of terrain you see. "When you look out the window, do you see the mountains, the ocean, lots of trees?"

- **Trees** -- Keep an eye out for different types of trees. Do they all have their leaves? Do they have blooming flowers?
- **Rocks** -- Can you find rock formations that resemble something?
- **Guess That Crop** -- When driving by a farm field, try to guess what they are growing there.
- **Clouds** -- Notice the variety of clouds. Will you see all the different types of clouds on your trip? What sort of images do you see in the clouds?
- **Maps** -- Swing by AAA and pick up some maps for your journey. Let the kids look at them and maybe even help navigate.

Music:

- **Make Up Songs** -- Pick a word or theme and see if you can make up a song.
- **Word Search** -- Pick a word and try to name (or sing) all of the songs you can with that word in it.
- **Name That Tune** -- Play a snippet of a song and see if your kids can guess what song it is.
- **Listen** -- Find the classical station and try to guess what instrument(s) is being played. Pick a station that plays music your family might not normally listen to and enjoy something different.
- **Maestro Classics** -- These are a fabulous way to introduce your family to famous musical pieces like *Swan Lake* and *Peter and the Wolf*.

Character Traits:

There's nothing more character-building than spending several hours trapped in a car with other human beings or being at an airport waiting.

- **Character Trait Game** -- While waiting at the airport, restaurant, etc. look for people who are exhibiting SLOCA character traits. "Did you see that man give that lady his seat, that was *kind*."
- **Character Trait Challenge** -- Select a character trait for the day and challenge each other to make an extra effort to display that trait.

Other:

- **Podcasts** -- Podcasts are another easy and entertaining way to "learn along the way". There are a ton of educational and family-friendly podcasts to listen to. Here are a few links with recommendations of podcasts to check out.
 - [12 Adventurous and Educational Podcasts for Kids](#),
 - [18 Best Podcasts for Kids in Elementary, Middle, and High School](#)
 - [Best Podcasts for Kids of All Ages](#)

- **Magazines/Catalogs** -- This is one of my favorite travel hacks. Before we go on a trip I start collecting magazines and catalogs. They might not always be educational, but they help pass the time. When the American Girl Doll catalog comes in the mail I tuck it away to be brought out at just the right moment on our trip. My kids will pour over the Oriental Trading Company catalog and this trick often buys me a bit of quiet. LEGO offers a free subscription to their magazine, [LEGO Life](#). The best part is that if the magazines and catalogs get wrecked or lost, it's no big deal.

Now let's be honest, as much as we may imagine a car trip where our kids are all happily engaging in screen-free educational activities, there will be those times when a little respite from noise is required. If a screen is offered to them to while away some time, why not make sure there is content available to them that is educational *and* fun.

Check out these links for suggestions for educational games, movies, and shows. [Common Sense Media](#) is an excellent resource for recommendations and ratings on TV shows, movies, books, and apps.

- [40 Educational Tv Shows Available on Netflix](#)
- [23 Educational Shows on Amazon Prime](#)
- [21 Free Educational Apps for Kids](#)

And don't forget the best game ever invented -- **THE SILENT GAME**. The parent who thought this one up was a genius. If you want to make it seem more "SLOCA-esque" you can label it "solitude time".

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